

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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@SenatorCardin



SenatorBenCardin



@senatorcardin

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Dear Fellow Marylanders:

Happy Pride Month! Throughout the month of June, we have been celebrating LGBTQ Pride. For more than 50 years, dating back to the Stonewall Inn, this commemoration has offered us a chance to celebrate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Americans and to reflect upon the progress that our nation has made in how we treat these individuals in law, policy, custom, and everyday life. It also is an opportunity to redouble our efforts to end enduring discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

These are our family members, neighbors and community members. For too long, many LGBTQ Americans were forced to hide their true selves. Pride Month is a time to say out loud that ‘love is love’ and individuals should not be discriminated against because of who they are.

In contrast to his predecessor, President Joe Biden promptly issued a presidential proclamation recognizing June of 2021 as Pride Month. With the authorization of Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, U.S. diplomatic missions around the world are displaying the Pride flag as a clear, visual representation of American values. In addition, on the very first day of his administration, the president issued an executive order on preventing and combating discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. This decision has already driven new policies that are making an important difference people’s lives, from protecting transgender individuals seeking safe shelter to reversing the Trump-era ban that prohibited transgender people from serving in the military.

The bad news is that while we see progress at a federal level, the Human Rights Campaign assesses that 2021 is the worst year in terms of state-level anti-LGBTQ legislation in recent history. Governors have signed 17 anti-LGBTQ bills into law, already exceeding the 15 anti-LGBTQ laws passed in 2015, which held the previous record in recent history. There are even more bills waiting governors’

signatures or veto override votes. Most of these bills shamefully target transgender children.

These bills and laws are untethered from public opinion. Recent polling from Gallup finds that support for same-sex marriage is at a new high of 70 percent of all Americans. A PBS/NPR/Marist poll published in April revealed that two-thirds of all Americans oppose legislation to ban transgender student athletes from joining sports teams that match their gender identity, a number that barely changes across partisan lines.

The American people clearly agree with the principle expressed in President Biden's executive order: "All persons should receive equal treatment under the law, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation." It's that simple.

When it comes to human rights, civil rights, and being treated with dignity and respect, where you live should not decide whether you could be discriminated against, lose your job or be blocked from renting a home because of your sexual orientation or gender preference. Everyone, in every zip code, deserves equal treatment.

Maryland continued to make progress at the state level during the 2021 session of the Maryland General Assembly. Joining Virginia and Washington D.C., our state banned the use of LGBTQ "panic defense," a blatantly discriminatory legal strategy that blames a defendant's actions on a victim's sexual orientation or gender identity. Other new laws make it easier for transgender Marylanders to change their names on official documentation and ensure that gender identity is clearly defined in the hate crime statute.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the *Equality Act* that the House of Representatives approved in February. This bill would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in education, employment, housing, credit, Federal jury service, public accommodations, and with regard to receiving federal financial assistance. These protections build upon and align with the Supreme Court's landmark decision one year ago in *Bostock vs. Clayton County*, which affirmed that the sex discrimination prohibition in the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* also applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. We still urgently need to pass the *Equality Act* to apply this interpretation to all areas of civil rights law and to strengthen protections against discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The Senate must pass the *Equality Act* and send it to the president's desk to be signed into law.

As Harvey Milk said, "It takes no compromise to give people their rights. It takes no money to respect the individual. It takes no political deal to give people freedom."

This Pride Month, and beyond, I would hope we can come together to protect the human and civil rights all Americans. Our government should do everything it can to promote equality, compassion, and empathy – not discrimination, bigotry, and hate.

I appreciate your support for our LGBTQ Marylanders and your support for civil rights for all.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Ben Cardin